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SUBJECT: FILIPINO NURSES STRUGGLE TO RESUSCITATE CAREERS AFTER U.S.  
VISA SLOWDOWN

¶1. SUMMARY: Nursing degrees provided thousands of Filipinos opportunities to work in the United States. Facing low wages and high unemployment at home, Filipino nurses were eager to help address the chronic nursing shortage in the United States. However, many of these job opportunities evaporated when fewer U.S. employment-based immigrant visas became available after 2005. Facing dim career prospects today, many nurses are seeking other avenues to enter the United States, providing an interesting example of how U.S. immigration policy can affect a foreign economy. END SUMMARY.

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CHASING THE DREAM  
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¶2. The United States has experienced a shortage of registered nurses for decades. This shortage is projected to reach 260,000 unfilled positions by 2025. Filipino nurses are well positioned to fill this gap due to their English fluency and training within a U.S.-based education system. U.S. healthcare institutions have actively recruited foreign nurses for years, and Filipinos have gladly heeded the call. Approximately 40 percent of all foreign nurses in the United States are from the Philippines.

¶3. Employment in the U.S. is an irresistible opportunity for many Filipinos. A registered nurse in the Philippines can expect to make approximately \$300 a month but could earn 10 times as much in the United States. Filipinos recognize that a nurse in the U.S. can provide a steady stream of remittances and sponsor family-based immigrant petitions for relatives with no other path to emigrating from the Philippines. In the past 10 years, the number of accredited nursing colleges in the Philippines swelled as parents pushed their children into the career. Nursing students readily admit that they entered the profession because it provides the best opportunity to work overseas, especially in the United States.

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A DOOR CLOSES  
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¶4. The path for a nurse to enter the United States for employment purposes is narrow. The preferred route of many Filipinos was through employment-based immigration (EB-3), which provided both a job and U.S. permanent residence. The only other method is to apply as a temporary worker under the H non-immigrant visa classification.

In both cases, the applicant must find a U.S.-based employer, who must obtain Department of Labor approval to hire a foreigner and then file a petition through the Department of Homeland Security. Both visa classes are numerically limited.

¶5. Immigration opportunities for nurses were significantly reduced in 2005 when the demand for employment-based immigrant visas exceeded the Congressionally mandated supply and applicants had to wait for an available slot. However, each time an EB-3 Filipino petitioned a family member, or a Filipino in the U.S. adjusted to employment-based immigrant status, a number was taken away from the quota. Thus, the waiting time for EB-3 visas in the Philippines continues to lengthen; visas can now be issued only for those with petitions approved before June 2002. In effect, an employment-based immigrant visa is no longer a viable way for nurses to work in the

United States.

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NURSES, NURSES, EVERYWHERE...  
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¶6. Many Filipinos were slow to recognize this change. In 2008 alone, Philippine nursing schools produced approximately 60,000 nurses accredited to practice in the Philippines, many of whom face bleak career prospects. An estimated 100,000 registered nurses are currently either unemployed or working in another vocation. Some nurses volunteer in hospitals without pay in hope of eventually being offered a salaried position. When a top hospital opened new nursing positions last year, it had to close the announcement early after being inundated with 4,000 applications. Healthcare institutions in the Philippines specifically cite U.S. visa retrogression as the cause of the decline in nurse turnover, from 50 percent in 2005 to 8 percent today.

¶7. The local economy has begun to respond to the over-supply of nurses. Enrollment in nursing schools throughout the Philippines has dwindled by up to 35 percent and some programs have closed altogether. Since 2008, the number of Filipinos taking the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX), which is required to practice nursing in the U.S., has dropped by approximately 20 percent. While some nurses continue to wait for their employment-based visas to become available, others are looking elsewhere for their next opportunity. Many nurses are seeking jobs in Europe, Canada and the Middle East while others pursue new careers.

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OTHER DOORS OPEN

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¶9. The American Federation of Teachers estimates 200,000 new U.S. teachers are needed each year to keep up with attrition and growing demand. Positions in math, science, and special education are increasingly hard to fill, and teacher shortages exist in nearly every state. Faced with this situation, more than 100 school districts throughout the United States have begun to recruit Filipino teachers. Besides temporary worker (H) non-immigrant visas, teachers have the added flexibility of also qualifying for exchange visitor (J) non-immigrant visas. Between 2000 and 2008, the number of newly hired teachers working overseas grew by an annual rate of 27 percent.

¶10. In addition to jobs in education, Filipinos continue to pursue careers in information technology, physical therapy, engineering and accounting with overseas employment as a primary goal. As the Philippines continues to experience high unemployment and low wages in the near term, the desire to find jobs in the United States will remain strong. Both applicants and employers will look for ways to find opportunities in existing employment visa categories.

BASSETT